

Assessing the impact of culturally specific Domestic Violence Shelters in Minnesota

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of lack of culturally specific services for Domestic violence victims and survivors who are African born in Minnesota. It aims to answer the question of whether providing culturally specific domestic violence services to women from the specific cultural backgrounds impacts the long-term outcomes for those victims.

I conducted in -depth interviews with eight women who identify as either survivors or victims of Domestic violence and are African born, I also interviewed two administrators of local culturally specific shelters in the Metropolitan area here in Minnesota.

The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether main stream Domestic violence shelters are providing culturally appropriate services to African born women, it is also to examine whether they are accomplishing the mission of empowering and sustaining these women to begin new and productive lives.

The overall results of this project show that culturally specific domestic violence programs had overwhelmingly positive results. Positive results are defined as the long-term successes of women who were victims or are survivors. Including obtaining a home, moving on their own and accomplishing an education and attaining independence.

Despite a strong network of quality victim service providers, domestic violence providers that offer culturally appropriate services are very limited for African Immigrant survivors and victims of Domestic violence in Minnesota.

Keywords: “An alien in the United States or at a port of entry who is found unable or willing to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Asylees declare asylum after arriving at their Port of Entry (“Homeland Security,”2015).

Introduction

African Born Women and Domestic Violence

The purpose of this project is to assess to re-establish African/African American culture as a healing resource for victims/survivors of domestic violence; articulating a cultural foundation for meeting their needs with multifaceted resources to penetrate intentionally and build both internal and external safety and wellbeing.

Founded in 2013 by Comfort Dondo, Phumulani Minnesota African Women against Violence (PMAWA) is a state of Minnesota approved 501c3 non-profit organization. Phumulani, a culturally specific organization, focuses on holistic needs of African born women who are survivors and or victims of gender-based violence.

One of the primary goals of this research project is to assess the impact having culturally specific programming for women who are survivors of Domestic abuse and are African born. By assessing the progress of women who have received some culturally specific support and those who did, not this is a comprehensive effort to understand the status of former residents of women's shelter programs throughout Minnesota.

To answer the question of whether providing culturally specific domestic violence services to women from the specific cultural backgrounds impacts the long-term outcomes for those victims; I discuss these common themes divided not sections: Demographics of interviewees; Employment; Housing ;Education; Health and Family; Skills; and Resources Acquired; Immaterial Support; and Challenges of Living at the shelters. I then conclude the interviews with recommendations for domestic violence shelters going forward.

This project is important because despite a strong network of quality victim service providers, domestic violence continues to be a significant issue in Minneapolis and Hennepin County. Recent data from the Domestic Abuse project suggests that African American women seek services disproportionately high rate.

For example, African Americans comprise 12.3 % of Hennepin County residents, yet 43% DAP advocacy clients are African American. This project is important because currently there are not enough culturally specific resources for the African Immigrants in Minnesota. According to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey, about one in five immigrants in Minnesota is African. Of the 50 states, Minnesota has the ninth-largest population of African immigrants (Melo, "For African immigrants, St. Paul starting to feel more like home," 2015). About 60 percent come from East African nations such as Somalia and Ethiopia, and 25 percent from West African nations such as Nigeria and Liberia (Melo, "For African immigrants, St. Paul starting to feel more like home," 2015). The rest come from elsewhere in Africa.

Although there is a clear need or culturally specific services, gaps and barriers exists in seeking funding to address the culturally specific needs of African Immigrant/African American survivors of domestic and dating violence.

Culturally Specific Programming: *Description of the Problem*

According to the Oregon Coalition against Violence (2015), culturally specific services are created by and for specific cultural communities with an emphasis on the voices and experiences of survivors of interpersonal violence (such as sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, etc.). Culturally specific organization focus, focuses on the holistic

needs of the Black community, such as education, economic development, culturally based community development, healthcare, and domestic violence.

Despite a strong network of quality victim services providers, domestic violence continues to be a significant issue in Minnesota. Recent data from the Domestic Abuse Project suggests that African American women seek services at a disproportionately high rate.

For example, African Americans comprise of 12.3 % of Hennepin County Residents, yet, 43% DAP advocacy clients are African American.

DAP Clients	Total 2276	Non- black 1287	Black 989 (43%)
DAP Clients that sought post-crisis Therapy	140	105	35 (3.5 %)
...of those #ordered by Child Protection Services	36	20	16(57%)
...of those Ordered by Probation	6	6	3(8.5%)

Figure 1

Minneapolis Domestic Violence Crime Statistics

Year	Domestic Calls for Service	Domestic Assault Reports Total:	Felony	Misdemeanor	Domestic Arrests Total
2007	18,460	5516	1192	4202	2382
2008	18, 215	4739	1133	3511	2092
2009	17, 992	3760	813	2817	1802
2010	17, 446	3012	701	2083	1408
2011	17, 017	2841	647	2195	1126

Figure 2

Context

In collaboration with the Domestic Violence Resource Center, Phumulani developed a definition of what culturally specific programming and appropriate service provision is. The strength, resilience, expertise and vitality of this culturally grounded work benefits all survivors and every community across our state.

Culturally specific services uplift the voices and experiences of those who, because of oppression, have been unheard or unheeded for too long. We know many communities are unserved, underserved, and inadequately served. Because of the endemic nature of racism, colonialism, white supremacy and xenophobia in the United States, as well as barriers that result from global cultural contexts, culturally specific services have historically been grounded in and grown from communities marginalized along racial, ethnic, immigrant, refugee or linguistic lines (n.d.).

The definition herein broadens beyond these initial categories, while recognizing the depth of need for services grounded in these communities. It strives to reflect their vision and values, as well as their lived experiences of racism and xenophobia.

Literature Review

There are fewer than 1,500 domestic violence shelters programs across the United States. Although it is limited, there is relevant literature concerning the unique circumstances and issues of women of color and LGBTQ, people face in regarding to combating Domestic Violence (DV). There are a few published studies that use a qualitative and in –depth approach to capture the experiences of women of color and the factors that influence their responses (Department of Justice, 1998).

For the last decade, Domestic Violence (DV) has been regarded as a leading threat to the health and well-being of adult women in the U.S. (Dwyer.et al 1995). Violence by intimate partners accounts for 29% of all violence against women ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). It is estimated that 39% of female emergency department visits are due to DV and more than 30% of female murder victims are killed by their partners Department of Justice, 1998).

According to Narayan (1995), there is little attention paid to immigrant women who are battered. The issues they face are not only those that affect battered women who are citizens, but also several cultural and legal barriers to seeking safety (n.d.). The process of immigration for men and women from developing countries is often a traumatic experience, in addition to that, many types of woman abuse are not defined as a crime in many communities from which the migrants have come (The British Council, 1999).

Immigrant communities have one thing in common with each other and with the United States societies: The Patriarchal social order supporting violence against women. This social order often silences victims, tolerates and minimizes the violence and provides protection to perpetrators ("Domestic Violence and the Immigrant Experience," 2016). (Erez, 2000).

Cultural factors such as language, degree of acculturation, religious beliefs and traditional help-seeking behavior substantially influence the way in which a woman who is abused by her partner will respond to the event ("Criminal Justice Reference: 185357," n.d.). Additionally, financial resources, social support, availability of culturally appropriate help and, for immigrant women, legal status and knowledge of their rights may all play a role (n.d.).

Despite assertions that ethnicity and culture influence women's response to DV, little is known about the experiences of DV in ethnic and LGBTQ communities ("Cultural Issues

Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). (6, 12, 13, 14). In recent years, Federal Health Agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Public Health Service have called attention to the lack of understanding of the unique issues facing women of color, particularly immigrant women who are victims of DV ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). There is growing recognition that understanding how various cultural communities perceive and respond to DV is essential for designing effective, culturally appropriate interventions ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). (5, 13, 14).

Most of the sources however, seem to rely heavily on provider perceptions and experiences which are normally different from the victims' and survivors' experiences).

Several factors have been identified that limit the ability of African born women to seek services for DV or leave violent intimate relationships ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). These include racism, lack of economic resources, lack of availability of services, the perception that services are for white women, reluctance to involve police or others outside of the community, as well as fear of being regarded as disloyal to the African American community or of reinforcing stereotypes about race and violence ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). (National Institute of Justice, (4th ed), p172)

Some researchers who have examined the cultural context of African American family violence have noted that social and environmental strains to which African American men are subjected have historically prevented them from fulfilling traditional male "provider and

protector” roles. This role conflict may be a contributing factor to family violence ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). Furthermore, relationships in which status differences exist between men and women (for example, in educational level or employment) have been related to risk for interpersonal violence; such differences often are found in African American pairings. (6) Potent tradition of relying on personal resources or inner strength among women of African descent may contribute to decisions regarding how and from whom women seek assistance. (2).

The cultural value of having male providers and female recipients is a double-edged, emphasizing women’s personal capacity to cope with the effects of violence, but also deterring some women from disclosing abuse or seeking assistance. (Neville & Pugh, 2005)

The significance of extended family among African Americans is an important potential resource for women experiencing DV; as such support may be more readily accessible than institutional resources such as shelters (24). At the same time, reluctance to threaten family cohesion might lead some women to avoid seeking outside help ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). However, there is little published literature that specifically relates to African immigrant experiences with DV ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.).

In comparison to African Immigrant women, Latino women’s ability to respond to a battering relationship may be influenced by language, economic status, and cultural norms regarding male and female roles, stress and lack of social support among recent immigrants ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.).

(11, 13)

The Catholic Church emphasizes that married couples should stay together, a strong religious value which influences women's decision-making. The importance of family, and cultural expectations around women's roles as mothers and wives may make responding to abuse difficult ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). Additionally, the lack of culturally appropriate services for Latinas is a significant barrier ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.). (9) An analysis of help-seeking behavior in a sample of Latinas derived from a national probability sample found that the most significant predictor of seeking help was comfort with English language, referred to by the authors as "degree of acculturation."(3).

According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), Final Report Page 5 of 172 on South East Asian victims and survivors, barriers to seeking service include, diverse in country of origin, language, timing of immigration, history, and religion, many of the Asian populations living in the U.S. share similar cultural values that influence their response to DV ("Cultural Issues Affecting Domestic Violence Service Utilization in Ethnic and Hard to Reach Populations," n.d.).(11)Several authors stress the value placed on family and cohesion of the family unit as an inhibitor to leaving an abusive relationship.(14,1,2) Community and family disapproval of divorce may also be a significant factor. (3).

There is also reluctance on the part of the Pacific Asian community to discuss publicly the issue. Other inhibitors include stigma associated with emotional problems and mental illness, and a belief that domestic problems are best addressed in the context of the family (Remote, 1996)

In a qualitative study of factors affecting communication with medical care providers regarding DV, Asian immigrant women said that they would feel comfortable disclosing abuse if providers asked in a sensitive manner. (3,7) American Indians/Alaska Natives Little research exists that describes the issues American Indian women face in responding to DV.

Some factors that have been identified as barriers to seeking service include lack of confidentiality due to small community size, loyalty to the tribe, a view of using outside providers as disloyal, and fear of desertion, social isolation and stigma. (3,9). Of the few articles that address DV among American Indian women, the majority focus on reservation-based populations and do not consider the unique circumstances of those living in urban areas.

Lack of culturally appropriate services may keep urban American Indian women from seeking help; (Norton & Manson, 2006), describe the difficulty of counseling urban Indian women in an office setting but found that home visits and a DV group attentive to cultural preferences were more successful. (4).

Methods

I refined the spreadsheet based on the following criteria: who was likely to respond to my outreach, who had enough English skills for a successful interview, who still lived in the Twin - cities. I obtained new research subjects through word of mouth, some of the women encouraged me to contact other women they had lived with. Every subject was given a disclaimer at the beginning of the interview, this interview is voluntary, and each woman had a choice to participate or not.

For the purposes of ensuring that this project focuses on more than just Shelter policies and procedures, I also interviewed Domestic violence shelters administrators to refine the information that will inform a Public Policy approach. I reviewed three Domestic violence shelters policies and procedures for culturally specific shelters and reviewed two with the administrators from the main -stream organizations that I reviewed.

Due to the limited time and for the purposes of completing this project in a timely manner, I decided to keep my interviews local; Interviewing two administrators, an Executive Director and House manager of culturally –specific Domestic Violence shelters in Mankato Minnesota.

I conducted my research through in -depth interviews with former residents of several domestic violence shelters and staff in the Twin cities. I pulled spreadsheet reports from some of the shelters through a shared database. This list consisted of women who identified as African born as they checked into 12 of the main stream domestic violence shelters that our organization refers women to in the Twin Cities. I looked at data from the last 2 years, between January 2016 to January 2018.

For two of the women, who lived in rural Minnesota I am conducting over the phone interviews with them. I am using a set of questions (6) to guide my conversations with the interviewees. These questions touched on employment, housing, education, health and family, future goals current living situation post leaving shelter. While I am ensuring asking these sets of questions, I wanted our interviews to feel organic and comfortable-more like conversations and not survey like questions.

Eight interviews were recorded orally and to prevent any violation of privacy, I did not audio record. I asked the interviewees for permission to use their story and testimony for communication materials by Phumulani. No first name or any identifiers would be used in these communication materials. I recorded detailed notes on major themes, relevant quotes, etc., in the interviews.

I used a set of questions (6) to guide my conversations with former residents of some of the shelters included for the sake of answering the research question; does providing culturally specific services in domestic violence shelter positively impact the outcomes for those victims from those specific culturally specific demographics.?

Interview Sample Questions

- How did you find out about the Shelter program (n.d.)?
- How long were you in shelter for?
- Did you move back home with your abuser and why? What do you think would have prevented you from moving back?
- How do you like your current living situation? Do you feel safe now?
- What kind of work are you doing? Does it provide you enough?
- Do stability?
- What things were missing at the shelter

Privacy

To maintain the rules and regulations per the IRB recommendations was transparent to the women regarding the purposes of the interviews, also the fact that their names will be altered to maintain their privacy.

Due to the power dynamics, between former residents and or clients with our organization, I was also transparent to ensure the women knew their options; they did not have to participate in these interviews if they were uncomfortable or felt traumatized from the experiences. For the purposes of this interview, I have focused my interviews on the services of the shelter providers, rather than on the past experiences of the women. I am also focusing on policies and procedures instead of individual stories.

Limitations of Methods

There are several limitations to my research, namely, the quantity of former residents of African descent who resided in Domestic Violence shelters. Research shows that women of African descent, do not check into shelters due to the stigma of divorce or separation in the culture. Furthermore, the response rates were very low. I reached out to 125 women and only 39 responded and 12 were interviewed successfully as these women continue to deal with challenging personal circumstances that make it difficult for them to participate in research studies. Moreover, many of them have likely moved multiple times since staying in the shelter. Additionally, most of the women are mothers and had family obligations that interfered with the scheduled interviews.

Combined with my part- time role with Phumulani, finding a time to meet was challenging. Occasionally some women would not show up to their interview without explanation. These complications resulted in fewer interviews than I would have liked.

Additionally, time was also not as available. After realizing that I had to focus on Legislative Policy as well instead of just shelter policies and procedures, I had to schedule interviews with Shelter administrators. This was also challenging as it was difficult to find an earlier interview time with them.

Despite these difficulties, I managed to conduct 12 interviews of former Domestic violence shelters residents of African descent, 8 in Minnesota who lived in non-culturally specific shelters and 4 who stayed at culturally specific shelters. I interviewed two administrators one from a local shelter in St Paul, and the other in Rural Minnesota.

My interviews do not represent a significant population of the African women in Minnesota, however on of my interviews included 5 women who stayed at the same shelter, thus making it a significant sample size, given the size of the shelter.

Overall, the respondents I interviewed, gave valuable insight into their experiences while living in the various Domestic violence shelters.

Research Limitations

- Number of women with inaccurate contact information
- Low response rate
- Logistical differences in arranging
- Interviews.

Figure 3

Description of Gaps in Services & How African Women Are Underserved

Given that Phumulani has is a fairly new organization, I interviewed Domestic Abuse Project (DAP) for this project. DAP has served in the Twin Cities Metro Area since 1979. They offer advocacy services to victims of domestic violence in Minneapolis and Hennepin County and therapy services to victims, perpetrators, child witnesses of domestic violence ("34 U.S. Code § 20124 - Enhancing Culturally Specific Services for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking," n.d.).

Based on my interviews with the Domestic AP staff, there is a realization that a gap exists for African born and African American women because of relatively low-participation in therapy services as compared to their participation in advocacy services.

The credence is that low utilization reflects the need for more culturally specific services. Phumulani, in collaboration with the Cultural Wellness Center has been engaging in numerous conversations and believe there is a clear need to reframe the existing mental health language and a focus model to a more culturally relatable language that promotes holistic wellness and healing for African American women.

The Domestic Abuse Project (DAP), has created these types of culturally specific services for Native American women, (a six-weekly circle), and Latina victims (a monthly talking circle). As a result of these culturally specific offerings, DAP has seen an increase in participation, utilizations, and effectiveness of services for Native and Latino Women both in advocacy and therapy.

Model Programs

In comparison, I interviewed two executive –Directors and staff of two culturally specific programs based in Minnesota and New York City. In the two interviews, I learned that

Minnesota has a culturally-specific program that fits a model program. The only down-side to this program is that it serves single women, for women fleeing abuse, they often have children hence looking at this program as a model but include recommendations.

Sarah's Model Program: St Paul Minnesota

A woman named Lobelo knocks on the door of an unassuming building tucked in the middle of an expensive neighborhood in St Paul Minnesota. She has received the address of this home from another woman she has met on the local bus route. Uncertain and nervous, she clutches her small suitcase in one hand and her two toddlers in another. A mature white woman responds to her knock.

In broken English, she explains her situation, she has been brought to the United States by a distant cousin, who promised her work but now she has been working under harsh conditions, without pay and or breaks and unable to care for her twin toddlers.

She learns that the old woman's name is Sister Susan, she hugs her in a hug and invites her into an entry way filled with soft beautiful paintings reflective of diversity and nations represented at this home. There are small flags in the entry way, some of which Lobelo recognizes, her neighbors Zambia, South Africa and her new home the United States. No Zimbabwean flag, though, she tells Sister Susan.

After speaking with Sister Susan about her lack of secure housing and learning the rules and expectations of this house, Lobelo learns that there is room that will soon become available, and she can move in then. This new Home will be her new home, Sister Susan leaves the house and by the end of the day, returns to the house with a new flag-Zimbabwe -to add to the bowl.

This is just one story among the many I have heard through the interviews I conducted thus far for this Project that demonstrates the generosity of shelters that provide some aspects of culturally specific programs to the women walking through their days.

Women come to Minnesota from all over the world and sometimes face obstacles that make them particularly vulnerable to homeless, unemployment, and lack of opportunity.

This research project was out of the need to acquire more information on the impact of providing culturally specific programming in the domestic violence movement to make meaningful changes to the program.

Sarah's an oasis for women is a ministry of the Sisters of St Joseph of Carbondale (CSJ), and serves as a home for 32, non-parenting women. The house originally served as a convent for the Durham community of Sisters, who taught at nearby Durham Hall High School. When the all-girls Durham Hall merged with the all-boys Cretin School, the Durham community moved and began to shrink in size. Influenced by their own charism of "loving God and the dear neighbor without distinction," as well as teachings of the Vatican II, the Sisters changed the mission of the convent to a transitional home and retreat for nuns seeking religious guidance and counseling. The first woman from outside the CSJ community, Regina, arrived at the new home as a resident in 1996.

Though Sara's can house anyone who meets the criteria of immigrant women receiving services from the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), residents must be non-parenting, over 20 years of age, lacking other appropriate resources, and able to contribute to a safe and productive home environment), immigrant women are most often lacking in housing resources.

There are several shelters and transitional homes for specific populations in Minnesota; The Casa Speranza home for Latina women fleeing abuse, the South East Asian Women's

Shelter in Minneapolis and the Native Women's resources for Native women who are survivors and victims of gender-based violence. There are also transitional homes for specific populations; there are several domestic violence shelters, homes for elderly and disabled, homes for HIV-positive individuals, etc. However, there are fewer homes that are suitable for asylees,³ refugees⁴, and other immigrants women who are lacking access to public programs and resources. Sarah's has evolved to primarily serve immigrant women because they are lacking in resources and have limited access to public programming eligibility. This model home for women, holds a unique place in the community of service providers in housing because of its access to marginalized women and often underserved immigrant women in transition.

Most of Sarah's residents are political Asylees and are unable to access many public services. While the women wait for their interview, their fear of this interview is credible and causes a lot of anxiety and depression for most of the women(an interview when an officer of the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services to determine if the asylee would be endangered by returning to their country of origin), they do not have access to public assistance programs and must rely on private support in order to get help they need (5).

In addition to asylees, Sarah's also serves refugees (of which Minnesota has many) and immigrants who may have come to the United States alone, or are struggling to get back on their feet. Refugee resettlement programs only receive funding for core services for the first 90 days after a refugee's arrival, after which the refugee is expected to be self-sufficient

(Advocates, 2014).

Sarah's addresses the unmet need of housing to a specific marginalized population; non-parenting immigrant women facing homelessness and are in transition. By focusing on this

population, staff members are better able to address the needs and challenges of the women. For example: staff understand the immigration process; staff understand the fear and uncertainty around immigration status; staff connect residents to appropriate services outside of Sarah's that serve women of varying residency statuses.

Housing a population of women who face similar challenges allows Sarah's to tailor its assistance towards these needs. And the residents of Sarah's can find empowerment in a community of women who are going through similar experiences.

In addition to providing shelter and food for its residents, Sarah's offers several services to assist women on their journey towards greater independence. Residents are encouraged to take ownership of Sarah's and are assigned house jobs to maintain a clean and comfortable house environment; they receive training and mentorship in these tasks from the House Manager. Sarah's staff also provides practical job hunting and help women in completing application forms, practice mock interviews for jobs and maintain an up-to date, open job board. For instance, Sarah's maintains strong ties to CVT, the International Institute of Minnesota, the Hubs Center, and other organizations that provide health care, legal aid, and educational opportunities for foreign born adults.

Results

In general, my findings from the culturally specific domestic violence shelters were overwhelmingly positive. The model violence shelters I reviewed in Minnesota were successful in their goal of providing a safe and productive home for the women and assist the women to ensure their well-being after leaving the shelter. While each woman has her own unique story, some common achievements and challenges materialized from these interviews. Below, I detail some of the themes that emerged during my interviews with former residents. These

achievements point to the culturally specific model working well; challenges illuminate areas where the Agencies interviewed could be doing more or providing better connections to resources outside the shelters.

In this section, I discuss the common themes divided into sections :Demographics of the women based on the region from Africa they are originally from ;Their length of stay in shelter ;Employment; Education; Health and Family; Skills acquired during stay ;Challenges faced living in shelter and lastly, current living situation.

I then conclude this report with recommendations for main stream Domestic violence shelters moving forward. The results are based on the findings from the basement results. These recommendations include both internal streamline shelter policies and procedures as well as possible Legislative recommendations that will help change current Public Policies that limit resources to culturally specific programs providing domestic violence shelters in Minnesota as well as around the country. The recommendations also include internal changes that will streamline relations with former residents of shelters, as well as some opportunities to improve culturally appropriate services.

Demographics of Interviewees

The women I interviewed come from all over the world, but East Africa and Asia are the most represented regions. The most represented countries include Ethiopia, Kenya and Zimbabwe, both among former residents I interviewed in the two culturally specific shelters. The countries represented, according to the administrators I interviewed include women who came to the United States from the following countries; Cambodia, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe(9).Resident's countries of origin have changed over time concurrently with global

migration patterns and changing support networks for different migrant populations, and the majority of women from the model shelter based in St Paul, came from Africa and Asia.ⁱ

An increase in the arrival of Ethiopian and Somali migrant to the Twin Cities (and the United States in general) starting in the 1990s and early 2000s is reflected in the demographic change in residents at that time (“Groups,”2016).

Length of Stay

From interviewing both the women and the administrators from the “Model Shelter”, based in St Paul it was evident that each woman has her own set of circumstances that made it easier or more difficult to move on from shelter. Thus, unlike many shelters or other homes for women in transition. Our Model Shelter does not set universal limits on lengths of stay.

Figure 4

Average Length of Stay	
Culturally Specific Program 1	665 days or approximately 22 months
Shortest Stay	33 Days
Longest Stay	1,825 Days or approximately 5 years
Mainstream Shelter Average Stay	3
Shortest Stay	2
Longest Stay	

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women (MCABW) 2016

However, over time, this Shelter has found that it can best serve its residents when it encourages a stay of approximately one year to 18 months. Women are encouraged to find permanent housing within this time frame. Of the 8 women I interviewed, the average length of stay was 665 days, or approximately 22 months. The median stay was 540 days, or approximately 18

months. The longest stay out of the women I interviewed was 1, 825 days or approximately, five years and the shortest stay was 33 days. (12)

Employment

Based on the findings from the interviews done at the Model Shelter, I found that, as soon as the women obtain permission to work (if they do not have it already), they are encouraged to find employment begin contributing to their living expenses. Living expenses are calculated on a sliding scale and do not exceed a monthly contribution of \$300. It is important that women pay some money to the shelter to encourage practicing giving back, to cover some of the costs of running the house, and so that the shelter can act as a landlord reference on resident's housing applications.

The shelter staff supports residents in their job search, interview skills, and more. The main goal of the Model Shelter is to help its residents to leave the house prepared to sustain a job that leads to increased opportunity stability.

Though many former residents face some common challenges that may impede true success, my results reveal some positive trends. (13) ; Most women I interviewed are currently employed in some capacity. Many are in the same jobs that they started when they were in shelter. This trend represents a significant improvement in the conditions that the women experienced when they moved into shelter.

Out of the 8 women I interviewed, six are implied full-time. One of the women is employed part-time and one under-employed and looking for work that she is qualified for. One noteworthy challenge for most immigrant women is underemployment and unemployed.

On-call hours do not provide reliable wages, are related to higher work-family conflict than regular work schedules, and are associated with higher work stress (Golden, 2015).

Another success is that former residents are employed primarily in professions that are stable and offer career pathways. Six of the 8 women I interviewed are in health care professions, including nursing, nursing assisting, and personal care attendants.

Healthcare is a robust and growing industry in Minnesota, and the field provides many opportunities for stable work and career advancement (O'Neil, 2015).

It also appears common to increase hours in this line of work; several residents spoke of starting nursing assistant jobs as on-call staff and increasing their hours over time as they got more experience.

On the other hand, my findings reflected a state-wide trend; foreign born-Minnesotans are not doing as well economically as their native -born counterparts. For instance, the median income of foreign-born Minnesotans is approximately \$49,500, while the median income for native -born Minnesotans is approximately, \$62,300("Median Income," 2016). So, while former shelter immigrant women residents' high rate of employment represents a significant success, it is important to note these differences and gaps in pay.

One of administrators from a local program that works with job readiness recommended the need to invest more resources to ensure long-term stable good paying jobs for the women when they move on from shelter. In the recommendations I will discuss potential opportunities for shelters to further assist women in their employment upon leaving shelter.

Housing

Unlike in the regular Domestic violence shelters, women come to the Model Shelter because their housing is unstable and most often are not facing immediate domestic violence. The women I interviewed at the "Model" shelter, come to the home because their housing is unstable. They might be living on the street, in a temporary shelter, sleeping on a friend's couch,

staying with a sponsor family, or at times their abuser. This model shelter provides a refuge for women to find peace, safety, and stability. The staff helps the women find stable housing to move into after their stay. They assist in completing housing applications, act as references, and help search housing databases for listings. Having stable housing makes it easier for former residents to focus on other areas of their lives, like advancing their careers and caring for their families. And finding stable housing is a necessary step before they can request to bring a family member to the US from their countries of origin. Of the 8 women I interviewed, 6 were renting in the private housing market, 2 were living in public subsidized housing.

Most expressed satisfaction with their living situations, and few women even live with former participants from the transition home, they have continued the sense of community they found at there. These results are extremely positive, especially when compared to overall outcomes for people in transitional housing.

According to a 2014 study by Wilder Foundation's Research on supportive housing outcomes in Minnesota, 43% of transitional housing participants experienced at least one more episode of homelessness after exiting (Wilder Research. 2014)

The fact that nearly all the interviewees from this model shelter have maintained their stable housing and it is a stark contrast to the statewide statistics.

Some of the interviewees expressed the desire to find more affordable private housing, or to find public housing. The Twin Cities metro area continues to grapple with a lack of affordable housing, both in the private market and in public housing (Milo, 2015)

The unmet need of affordable housing presents a persistent problem to residents moving out of most shelters, per the administrators I interviewed.

Furthermore, some of the women I spoke to would like an opportunity to live in subsidized housing, which they state would be only 30% of their income towards the rent and would release the burden of the rent expense on their already low-income.

Recommendations

Overall, the programs involved in this study seem to succeed in their mission and vision. The following are preliminary recommendations for improving responsiveness to victims from the communities interviewed. Consistent with the participatory nature of this Project, a fuller and more developed set of recommendations will develop through the efforts of collaborative partnerships between mainstream programs like the Coalitions for Battered women and culturally specific organizations and the interests of experts in this field. Phumulani, as an organization is already engaged in ongoing dialogue about these findings with DV service providers, systems leaders and community leaders. Recommendations presented here, are mostly based on the suggestions from participants themselves as well as the interpretation of the interviews from the several administrators interviewed.

These recommendations may also have implications for other communities, but they are presented here in the context of the communities studied. Although they may also apply to mainstream communities, it is important to recognize the complexity of DV for disadvantaged and marginalized victims. Not only are they coping with DV but also with racism, homophobia anti-immigrant sentiment, linguistic isolation, and economic marginalization. Efforts to address DV in these communities must also address these underlying issues and recognize their relationship to DV and to victim responses, as well as system responses.

My recommendations are organized into three categories: systems-level (public sector systems); service-level (community based-services); and community level. The effects of DV are

pervasive in women's lives and in communities. For this reason, the recommendations are far-reaching and span social sectors.

Systems Level -Immigration Services

International marriages were a major of concern, several women in several ethnic groups in this study, (Amharic, speaking), pointed out several difficulties in their situations. Recommendations made by victims themselves point to the need for investigation into potential for changes Immigration laws regarding international marriages.

Suggestions include; prohibiting those convicted of prior domestic violence offences from bringing a spouse from overseas; making applicant's criminal and marriage history available to their fiancée before they can decide to come to the U.S and providing the women with information in their own language about domestic violence before they leave their home countries.

Education for Immigrants and Refugees

The participants interviewed emphasized the need for more information on all aspects of the U.S law, immigration services and immigrant rights as they relate to domestic violence. This information should be given to women as they enter the country. Education should be offered to both men and women and clearly articulate laws as it relates to DV.

Educational material should be culturally appropriate for clients as some participants mentioned the lack of some language like Domestic Abuse in their native language, some patriarchal practices that may be tolerated or accepted in some cultures, may be confused with Domestic Abuse in the U.S.

Safety Net

Welfare programs are a lifeline for women who are fleeing violence, based on the interviews conducted; both the women and the shelter administrators expressed some significant critic of the national welfare system and major changes and limitations in federal entitlement programs.

New time-limits on welfare to work, puts women at risk of returning to their abusers. Provision of affordable and accessible child care and other social services are essential. Greater advocacy is needed to preserve what remains of the safety net, and to ensure appropriate special considerations for D.V victims.

Criminal Justice System

This project highlighted the fact that the Criminal justice system protection of victims remains a significant challenge. For people in non-mainstream communities, knowledge of the system, trust, racism, homophobia, and fear of stereotyping are all barriers to using services. For non-English speaking women, access to the criminal justice system is dependent on knowing that DV is against the law, that they have the right to get help, and that their immigration status will not cause them to be arrested.

Historically marginalized communities' relationship with the police, racism, homophobia and the view of police not serving their communities is a significant impediment I discovered in my conversations with women.

A recommendation thus is to continue to educate the police about determining who the victim is when a DV call is made.

Continued policy changes on not always leading to Child protection involvement and mandatory arrests.

The preliminary recommendations above are a follow-up of my discussion with the women I interviewed. Policy efforts to address DV in the African American and African Immigrant communities must also address the underlying social issues and recognize their relationship to DV, but also marginalization. Policies must also consider the intersection between DV with racism, homophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, linguistic isolation, and economic marginalization.

Conclusion

The interviews conducted, and the shelter programs assessed are exceptionally valuable resources for immigrant women in transition and fleeing danger. This research project has provided important information regarding the impact of having culturally appropriate shelter services for women fleeing DV and how it impacts their long-term healing and moving on to safety.

All the resources the programs assessed currently provide as well as their more intangible qualities, have a positive impact. Those programs offering culturally specific programming and shelter, and should focus on retaining excellent services they currently offer.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, participatory research must lead to real change within the communities researched. It is important for funders, researchers and policy makers to recognize that the relationship between the survivors of DV from either community impacts the greater community in one way or the other.

Minnesota has the largest African populations (Liberian and Somali), outside of Liberia and Somalia consecutively and if we are to convince communities of the value and utility of the need for change, we must demonstrate linkages by valuing the voices of those most impacted and most underserved.

Appendix A

Table 1

Interviews

ID #	Dates Arrived	Dates Left	Length of Stay (Days)	Overall Impact
3	11/15/2008	11/16/2010	721	Generally, somewhat positive
7	09/01/2011	03/02/2015	1216	Positive
2	09/01/1999	10/04/1999	33	Positive
7	08/15/2012	09/30/2012	1125	Great
23	08/29/2007	12/15/2007	106	Positive
20	05/26/2005	05/15/2006	349	Positive
1	01/01/1998	12/31/1998	360	Positive
6	06/02/2008	08/31/2008	90	Very Negative
8	04/22/2014	05/11/2015	379	Very positive
10	Administrator			

Interview Questions

- Demographic information: Current and while living in the transitional home (If this information does not exist in Apricot)
 - What years were you staying there?
 - Age now/at stay?
- Can you tell me a little about your story? How did you find out about the shelter? Why did you pick it over the other shelters?
- What were the most helpful skills that you gained while in Shelter that you use in your daily life now?
- Services utilizing now, (gave them examples; connections made through the shelter to help with immigration, school and health, transportation etc.)
- What was the most helpful resource?
- What are your current goals? Will what you have learned in shelter help you accomplish them.
- What is your housing situation now? Are you in public housing? Will you be able to stay in that place for a long time or are you there for a short-period of time. Who do you live with?
- What kind of work are you doing? Is it providing you with enough to sustain you?
- How is your immigration status and do you have any family here in the USA?

- Are you active in your community? Are you still in touch with the shelter?
- Looking back was there anything about your time living there that you would change.
Overall, how was your experience, generally positive to negative?

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Footnotes

1 “An alien in the United States or at a port of entry who is found unable or willing to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Analyses declare asylum after arriving at their Port of Entry (“Homeland Security,”2015).

2 Apricot is Phumulani’s client management database. Each woman has her own account page, in which staff records information to provide a snapshot of women’s stay in shelter.

3 In this paper, immigrant is used broadly to refer to anyone who comes to live permanently in a foreign country and not specify under what terms they immigrated.

Footnotes

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ⁱ See Appendix C for report of interviewees' countries of origin